YourTurn

Game over

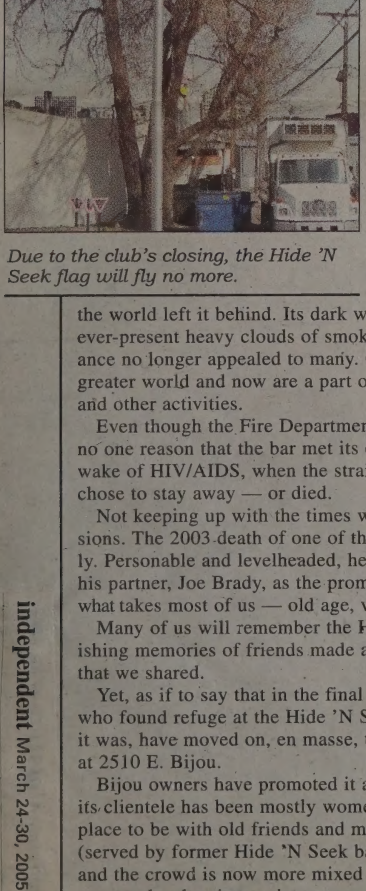
Hide 'N Seek closing marks end of an era

By Frank Whitworth

Tattered and worn, the rainbow flag flies over a darkened Hide 'N Seek Complex, a metaphor of what led to the closing of this gay bar on March 15.

The Hide 'N Seek opened in the early 1970s on Colorado Avenue downtown. It was an instant success, packed to capacity nightly, a refuge for gays — a place to find friends and feel safe.

When the club moved to the 500 block of West Colorado in 1974, the huge crowds did not let up. The complex became a major entertainment center featuring national acts, including many top drag entertainers. It was the center of gay life for years — a place to gather and party, for sure, but, also a community center of sorts. Many organizations, such as the United Court of the Pikes Peak Region, the Metropolitan Community Church and the Gay Rodeo, were born there. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised for charities (initially some charitable organizations turned down the funds).



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Due to the club's closing, the Hide 'N Seek flag will fly no more.

The club joined the effort to educate the community on HIV/AIDS in the '80s, and was a center of political activism in the '90s, when anti-gay Amendment 2 raised its ugly head. Memorial services were held in the club for many who died, mostly of AIDS.

To some the Hide 'N Seek was a place to find support in times of trouble or despair. To others, it was a home away from home. Often, especially on weekends when the best shows were held, straight people headed there in droves.

The complex included bars for men, women, cowboys, the leather crowd and underage youth (no alcohol), as well as a restaurant, the main show room and the dance room. As the club expired last week at the ripe old age of 35 it was still trying to maintain the semblance of grander days. That may have had something to do with its demise. Unchanging, the world left it behind. Its dark walls and heavy atmosphere, its size, its ever-present heavy clouds of smoke and its arcane, tattered and worn appearance no longer appealed to many. Gays have found more acceptance in the greater world and now are a part of the crowds you find at downtown bars and other activities.

Even though the Fire Department closed it for code violations, there was no one reason that the bar met its end. Its demise probably started in the wake of HIV/AIDS, when the straight crowds disappeared and many gays chose to stay away — or died.

Not keeping up with the times was significant, as were bad financial decisions. The 2003 death of one of the owners, Tom Gehling, contributed heavily. Personable and levelheaded, he was the business brains of the team with his partner, Joe Brady, as the promoter. It is likely that the club died from what takes most of us — old age, with all the ailments that comes with it.

Many of us will remember the Hide 'N Seek for the rest of our lives, cherishing memories of friends made and lost, and the fun, events and activities that we shared.

Yet, as if to say that in the final analysis it was just a building, those of us who found refuge at the Hide 'N Seek, socialized there and were really what it was, have moved on, en masse, to a new location, the Bijou Bar and Grill at 2510 E. Bijou.

Bijou owners have promoted it as serving both men and women. In truth, its clientele has been mostly women. We have found acceptance there — a place to be with old friends and meet new ones in a great atmosphere (served by former Hide 'N Seek bartender, Dave B.). The women are terrific and the crowd is now more mixed between men and women. Straight people seem to be showing up in greater numbers, too.

An era has ended but ... life goes on.

Frank Whitworth is a community activist and is a director of Voters Network, a nonprofit that promotes a progressive community.

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ication

rise, which negates procreation.

I suggest the NEA and Focus on the Family stop opposing homosexuality. Gays may be God's answer to our overpopulation crisis.

— Janet Brazill
Colorado Springs

Bill of wrongs

Westboro Baptist Church is returning to the Springs this Thursday, March 24 with it's "God Hates Fags" campaign, which makes me wonder.

I wonder why the City Council refuses to pass a proclamation denouncing Westboro's hateful speech?

I wonder why antiwar protesters, with a message of peace, have their First Amendment rights reduced into "free speech zones" and Westboro has theirs expanded to include their hate speech, harassment and disorderly conduct?

I wonder why the TV news crews had their First Amendment rights completely abridged by the Colorado Springs Police Department during the last visit, when they were not allowed to interview the Phelps family?

I wonder why there are so many selective enforcements of the First Amendment in this town?

— Mark Lewis
Colorado Springs

Wilting on the vine

I've always considered John Hazlehurst one of the more open-minded, caring and sometimes visionary members of our community. That magnifies my disappointment at the disservice he did to readers with last week's column.

letters continued on next page ▶

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March 24-30, 2005 • Vol 13, No 12

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Thanks to SJ Scooter Club who joined the Indy for the St. Patrick's Day parade.

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CF 2005 PRESS
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